Unit 2 Writing: Spinning True Stories into Gold

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 2**
Length: **6 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

This curriculum guide outlines a comprehensive Grade 4 writing unit focused on spinning true stories into gold, spanning approximately September to October. The unit is divided into three distinct bends, guiding students through the entire writing process for personal narratives. Ultimately, students are prepared to produce a collection of full stories in their writer's notebooks, with the unit culminating in a celebration where they share their revised pieces with invited friends and family.
Here's a breakdown of the unit:

Bend 1: Filling Notebooks with the Stuff of Life (1 ½-2 weeks)

- This initial phase focuses on helping students generate powerful and meaningful personal narrative topics by exploring their own lives and experiences.
- Students learn to identify story elements and track character actions, thoughts, motivations, and changes.
- They practice close reading short fiction texts, poems, and picture books to find "story ideas" and map out their stories using various strategies.
- Key skills developed include drafting what's happening inside their characters, bringing characters to life with dialogue, and tackling personally tricky words related to conventions.

Bend 2: From Stuff to Story – Rehearsal, Drafting, Revision, Editing (1 ½-2 weeks)

- This bend guides students through the core of the writing process, starting with rehearsing their stories in different ways to develop their content.
- Students learn to write a flash-draft and then focus on developing the "heart of the story", ensuring strong reasons and supporting evidence.
- Emphasis is placed on choosing precise details to elaborate their narratives and a purposeful use of commas for clarity and impact.
- Students are encouraged to self-assess and measure growth using checklists.

Bend 3: Add Luster – Learning from Mentor Texts (2-2 ½ weeks)

- In this final phase, students add depth and polish to their writing by deeply engaging with mentor texts.
- They learn to rehearse and prepare to draft new stories, balance summarizing with detailed drafting, and use their knowledge as readers to elevate their writing.
- Students conduct an inquiry into mentor texts to understand authors' craft and techniques, particularly focusing on revising endings for greater impact and admiring how mentor texts use specific details and conventions.
- The unit also addresses checking for and addressing run-on sentences to improve sentence construction.

Throughout the unit, students utilize writer's notebooks, engage in peer collaboration through partner work and sharing, and apply concepts learned from mentor texts and checklists to refine their personal narratives.

This unit is designed to be part of a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including physical and social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. During this course, students are provided with opportunities to develop skills that pertain to a variety of careers.

Revision Date: June 2026

Pacing Guide

Please refer to the Language Arts Writing Workshop pacing guide for grade 3 in the curriculum folder. Sentence Study is paced and aligned within the Syntax, Style, Grammar and Conventions section. Please refer tothis folder for the scope and sequence as well as specific lessons and materials.

A sample K-5 Literacy Schedule Across a Week is accessible in instructional materials section of the Grades K-5 folder.

Standards

The identified standards reflect a developmental progression across grades/ levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness and global citizenship.

These mandates may be hit through the selection of choice literature:

Amistad Commission

This unit also reflects the goals of the Department of Education and the Amistad Commission including the infusion of the history of Africans and African-Americans into the curriculum in order to provide an accurate, complete, and inclusive history regarding the importance of African-Americans to the growth and development of American society in a global context.

Asian American and Pacific Islander History Law

This unit includes instructional materials that highlight the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in accordance with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Social Studies.

New Jersey Diversity and Inclusion Law

In accordance with New Jersey's Chapter 32 Diversity and Inclusion Law, this unit includes instructional mater

economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and belonging in connection with gender and sexual orientatior

The standards that follow are relevant to this course in addition to the associated content-based standards listed below.

	Collaboration with individuals with diverse perspectives can result in new ways of thinking and/or innovative solutions.
9.2.5.CAP.1	Evaluate personal likes and dislikes and identify careers that might be suited to personal likes.
	Curiosity and a willingness to try new ideas (intellectual risk-taking) contributes to the development of creativity and innovation skills.
9.2.5.CAP.4	Explain the reasons why some jobs and careers require specific training, skills, and certification (e.g., life guards, child care, medicine, education) and examples of these requirements.
L.WF.4.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of encoding and spelling.
	Intellectual property rights exist to protect the original works of individuals. It is allowable to use other people's ideas in one's own work provided that proper credit is given to the original source.
L.WF.4.3	Demonstrate command of the conventions of writing, including those listed under grade three foundational skills:
L.WF.4.3.A	Use basic paragraphing, including using paragraph indentations and using paragraphs in dialogue.
L.WF.4.3.B	Place adjectives and adverbs and form comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs.
L.WF.4.3.C	Use independent clauses and coordinating conjunctions.
L.WF.4.3.G	Use underlining, quotation marks, or italics for titles; use quotation marks for direct speech; use comma before a coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence.
	Culture and geography can shape an individual's experiences and perspectives.
	Digital tools can be used to modify and display data in various ways that can be organized to communicate ideas.
	Different digital tools have different purposes.
	Collaborating digitally as a team can often develop a better artifact than an individual working alone.
W.WP.4.4	With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.
W.WP.4.4.C	Consider writing as a process, including self-evaluation, revision and editing.
W.RW.4.7	Write routinely over extended time frames (with time for research and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
SL.PE.4.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
SL.PI.4.4	Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner,

	using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.
SL.AS.4.6	Differentiate between contexts that call for formal English (e.g., presenting ideas) and situations where informal discourse is appropriate (e.g., small-group discussion); use formal English when appropriate to task and situation.

Performing Arts Standards

1.4.5.Cr1: (a). Create roles, imagined worlds, and improvised stories in a drama/theatre work articulating the physical qualities of characters, visual details of imagined worlds, and given circumstances of improvised stories in a drama/theatre work. (b). Imagine, articulate, and design ideas for costumes, props, and sets that support the story, given circumstances, and characters in a drama/theatre work. (c). Imagine how a character's inner thoughts impact their actions and collaborate to determine how characters might move and speak to support the story and given circumstances in drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Cr3: (a). Collaborate with peers to revise, refine, adapt, and improve ideas to fit the given parameters of an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work through self and collaborative review. (b). Use and adapt sounds and

movements in a guided drama experience. (c). Refine technical choices by creating innovative solutions to design and technical problems that arise in rehearsal for a drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Pr5: (a). Describe and apply dramatic elements of dialogue, action, character emotion, and theme in the

performance and/or creation of a drama/theatre work. (b). Physically and intellectually investigate how movement and vocal choices are incorporated and make meaning in drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Re9: (a). Compare and contrast multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work. and justify responses to drama/theatre work based on personal experience. (b). Explain responses to characters based on cultural perspectives when participating in or observing drama/theatre work. (c). Identify and discuss physiological changes connected to emotions on posture, gesture, breathing, and vocal intonation in drama/theatre work.

Essential Questions/ Enduring Understandings

- What makes a personal narrative powerful and meaningful to readers?
- How can I use details, dialogue, and description to bring my story and characters to life?
- How does following the writing process help me improve my writing?
- What can I learn from mentor texts to strengthen my own storytelling?

- How do writers use structure and craft to help readers understand the heart of a story?

Students Will Know/ Students will be Skilled At

By the end of this unit:

- Students will write a small collection of full stories in their writer's notebook- a digital notebook or a physical notebook.
- Students will rehearse, draft, revise, and edit to compose tightly focused narratives that bestow traits onto the characters and follow a story arc, allowing their readers to learn about the motivations, troubles, and changes of the character experience.
- Students will set goals and apply techniques and crafts from mentor texts to improve their storytelling, leads, endings, elaboration, conventions, and sentence construction.
- Students will learn that writers use commas to expand and combine sentences, or to signal readers to pause before reading on.

Evidence/Performance Tasks

Students demonstrate differentiated proficiency through both formative and summative assessments in the classroom. Based on individual student readiness and performance, assessments can be implemented as formative and/or summative.

Developmental progression across years in both reading and writing is evidenced by multiple benchmark assessment screeners, administered three times per year. Follow up diagnostic assessments are used to target skill remediation. Student proficiency allows for additional or alternative assessment based on demonstration or absence of skill.

The performance tasks listed below are examples of the types of assessments teachers may use in the classroom and the data collected by the district to track student progress.

Formative:

- Answer essential questions
- Teacher observations/conferring notes
- Turn and talks
- Partnerships rehearsing their writing
- Peer Conferences

- Writer's Notebook (quick writes/drafts/prewrites)
- Teacher checklists using mini-lessons for measurable skills
- Writing Conferences: Individual and small group
- Writing Partnership work and discussions
- Writing folders with student work
- Writing pieces to note the growth need of the writer
- Observations
- Listening in on partnership discussion of writing piece
- Drafts online (Google Docs)
- Writing Club work and discussions

Summative:

- Students should have 2-3 final pieces to score not including the post assessment.
- Published pieces
- Score grammar and spelling in final drafts only
- Student portfolios
- During publishing students read their piece to assess oral speaking and reading skills
- Rubrics: created for the standards-based report card as well as teacher-created.
- Standards should be addressed as reported on the Standards-Based Report Card and should reflect this work:

  *Orients the reader by establishing a situation (introduction)

  *Organize your writing into a sequence that unfolds naturally and uses a variety of transitional words

  *Provides an appropriate end to their writing piece

  *Elaborates by using precise details and descriptions

Benchmark:

- Benchmark writing assessments: opinion, narrative, and informational, scored using rubrics, district-created and provided.
- Located in the shared Grades K-5 Language Arts folder on the Google Drive, reported three times per year

Learning Plan

Our upper elementary writing instruction follows a balanced literacy approach including a number of strategies and techniques in Writing Workshop. These include mini-lessons, shared writing, independent writing, small group strategy instruction, one-to-one conferencing, partnerships and/or writing clubs. Writing Workshop emphasizes immersion, independence, and choice. Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer. Each unit ends with a celebration of learning where children share their

writing with others in the school community.

To assist students in reaching the goals for this unit, teachers will guide them through the following steps:

- Immersing students to study the purpose, structure, and characteristics of writing while generating possible writing ideas
- Choosing topics by considering focused areas of expertise
- Organizing information and writing pieces
- Elaborating to increase writing volume and to add a variety of detail
- Revising and editing to prepare for publishing

Through mentor text, students will be immersed in text type in order to recognize text features and structures of the particular type of writing. It is suggested that students form writing partnerships with the goal of collaborating and supporting each other throughout the writing process. Grammar and conventions mini lessons will be taught throughout this unit during Sentence Study.

Lessons should follow the mini-lesson format:

- Teaching point(s) for each lesson
- Connection: Connects new learning to previous learning/lessons
- Teach/Modeling: Uses 'think alouds' when modeling what you expect students to do
- Guided Practice/Active Engagement: Guides students through practice of the teaching point
- Link to Independent Practice: Helps writers understand the purpose for the writing they are about to do and the skills/craft they will be practicing/applying independently as good writers
- Independent Writing/Student Conferences: Provides time for students to do independent writing while teacher confers with individual students, works with small groups, or writing clubs.
- Closure/Sharing: Pull students back together and recognize the work they have done relating to the teaching point.

The architecture of a writing conference includes:

- Research
- Decide
- Teach and Coach with guided practice
- Link

A writing club is like a book club. It is a group of students that meet to discuss one student in the group's piece at a time. The students listen to the piece read aloud. If on Google Docs, it can be shared with the group and they can follow along. (This takes a lot coaching in the beginning.) Students provide feedback to the writer, first what they did really well, and provide evidence from the piece that supports it. Then they provide something that they can use to enhance their piece and evidence as to why it can be changed. The writer that shared can use the advice. Developing trust in the group and valuable advice takes time. Over time groups can run on their own.

Teachers may personalize instruction during this unit and address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students.

Before Beginning this Unit

Before beginning this unit:

- Set up a writing center with paper choices (or choose to use Chromebooks for digital writing).
- Distribute writing folders and writing notebooks

Begin by administering the narrative on-demand writing prompt.

Detailed Curriculum Map

Teaching Points and lessons are located in the K-5 folder under Grade 4 Curriculum for Language Arts. These curriculum unit guides include not only aligned teaching points to standards, but also specific lessons and appropriate resources. Guidelines for preparing to teach the unit as well as goals for the end of the unit are outlined. Academic vocabulary and prerequisite skills are identified. Essential questions and possible assessments are detailed as well.

Materials

The materials used in this course allow for integration of a variety of instructional, enrichment, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

The core materials for this unit include the Units of Study in Writing for grade 4, The Reading and Writing Project at Mossflower, 2025-2026.

Materials used for grammar and convention study include the following: Patterns of Power: Inviting Young Writers into the Conventions of Language by Jeff Anderson.

Instructional Materials

The instructional materials which correspond with this unit are linked in the detailed curriculum map under resources and housed in the Grades K-5 folder under grade 4.

The core materials for this unit include the Units of Study in Writing for grade 3, The Reading and Writing

Project at Mossflower, 2026. Here is a link to the instructional materials for this unit.

Please refer to curriculum folder under grade 4 for specific materials for Sentence Study.

Samples of student work

- Published pieces
- Read Aloud from realistic fiction reading unit:

  *Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo (Whole Class Read)
  *Stone Fox by John Reynolds Gardiner
  *Clementine
  *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing
  *Fourth Grade Rats
  *Thank you Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco
  *The Bee Tree by Patricia Polacco
  *The Junkyard Wonders by Patricia Polacco
  *Mr. Lincoln's Way by Patricia Polacco
  *Something About Hensley's by Patricia Polacco
  *Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair by Patricia Polacco
  *Those Shoes by Maribeth Boelts
  *Dear Mr. Henshaw by Beverly Cleary
  *Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

- Fireflies by Julie Brinkloe
- What Do Fish Have to Do With Anything? by Avi (anthology)
- America Street: A Multicultural Anthology of Stories edited by Anne Mazer (anthology)
- Tripping Over the Lunch Lady edited by Nancy Mercado (anthology)
- Past, Perfect, Present Tense by Richard Peck (anthology)
- Guys Read: Funny Business edited by Jon Scieszka (anthology)
- Baseball in April by Gary Soto (anthology)
- Highlights, Ladybug, and New Moon magazines—every issue in each publication features short fiction

Potential Teaching Charts:

- Advice for Developing a Character
- Qualities of Good Personal Narrative Writing
- Ways writers Rehearse their stories
- What are Lenses to Edit through?
- Arc of a Story Chart
- Notice and Name Leads
- Notice and Name conclusions
- Student Work Samples to model exceptional work or work that whole group can revise
- Possible Plot Point Ideas:

  Character with a problem or goal
  Character against nature
  Lost and Found

Good guys versus Bad guys
Mystery gets solved

- Class Writing Piece
- Study Ways Authors Make Stories Better
- Problem and Solution Chart

Teacher Resources

- Heinemann Online Flight Materials
- *The Writing Strategies Book*, Jennifer Serravallo
- *Feedback that Moves Writers Forward,* Patty McGee
- *Patterns of Power*, Jeff Anderson
- *Mechanically Inclined*, Jeff Anderson
- *The Story of My Thinking*, Gretchen Bernabei
- Trail of Breadcrumbs Website
- Two Writing Teachers Blog
- *Assessing Writers*, Carl Anderson
- Cranford Public School Grades K-5 Google Folder for instructional materials

Suggested Strategies for Modifications and Accommodations

Content specific accommodations and modifications as well as Career Ready Practices are listed here for all students, including: Special Education, English Language Learners, At Risk of School Failure, Gifted and Talented, Students with 504 plans.

The structure of writing workshop is designed to differentiate and address specific goals and learning for each reader:

- The unit includes presentation of material through multiple modalities such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic to address the unique learning styles of all students.
- The teacher will assign, assess and modify if necessary to address the specific needs of the learner.
- Students have individualized choice of topics within each unit.
- Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer.

Possible accommodations during writing workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Use visual presentations of all materials to include organizers, charts, word walls.
- Allow students to set individual goals for writing.
- Work in partnerships
- Give responses in a form (verbal or written) that is easier for the student

- Take additional time to compete a task or project
- Take frequent breaks
- Use an alarm to help with time management
- Mark text with a highlighter or other manipulative such as a post-it
- Receive help coordinating assignments
- Answering fewer questions or completing shorter tasks
- Create alternate assignments or homework
- Provide distinct steps in a process; eliminate unnecessary steps, as needed.
- Manage executive function by scaffolding process and amending deadlines
- Access speech to text function on computer

For possible modifications to content during writing workshop, please . . .

- Adhere to all modifications and accommodations as prescribed in IEP and 504 plans.
- Refer to Strategies for striving students
- Refer to the Pathways to Intervention documents in the K-5 folder for specific appropriate interventions.
- Consult with Cranford Problem Solving Team (CPST), as needed.

Framework for Alternative Setting (LEAP Program at Lincoln School)

In our K–5 alternative school setting, each class consists of students who require a highly personalized approach to reading instruction. The district's core Writing Units of Study will continue to serve as the primary writing curriculum framework; however, lessons will be further adapted to ensure accessibility and engagement for all learners. Teachers will use a combination of pacing adjustments, flexible timing, and individualized goal setting to meet students at their current skill levels. Instruction will be delivered through a blend of whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one settings, with intentional scaffolds in place to build confidence and reduce frustration.

To adapt any writing unit for an alternative school serving students with school avoidance, anxiety, behavior challenges, and social constraints, teachers should employ flexible, supportive modifications while aligning with grade-level writing standards (focusing on organization, elaboration, and mechanics) and speaking/listening standards (focusing on collaborative discussions).

- Timing Adjustments: Extend the pacing of instructional blocks or bends (e.g., extending a typical 2-week drafting phase to 3 weeks) with shorter daily writing sessions (20–30 minutes). Incorporate calming transitions or choice-based entry activities to ease transition anxiety.
- Activity Modifications: During the initial brainstorming and topic-generation phase, use sensory-friendly methods like drawing, sketching, or voice recording instead of demanding whole-group sharing. During structural planning, provide pre-made graphic organizers tailored to the specific genre's layout (e.g., chronological, narrative plot maps, or thesis-and-reason structures) and allow low-stakes, paired verbal rehearsals to build confidence. For the revision phase, incorporate supportive one-on-one teacher conferring for feedback, replacing peer review sessions with optional self-reflection journals. Simplify checklists and rubrics with visual icons, and offer flexible writing alternatives like dictated drafts or digital speech-to-text tools for students with severe writing aversion.

- Intervention Programs: Integrate comprehension-focused frameworks (such as Visualizing and Verbalizing) to unpack exemplar texts, structured foundations programs (like UFLI) for keyword jotting and sentence-level drafting, and systematic phonics/morphology programs (like Sonday System) during conventions exploration (e.g., mechanics, grammar, and parts of speech).
- NJTSS Framework: Implement Tier 1 universal supports, such as explicit modeling of introductions, transitions, and conclusions with visual aids; Tier 2 targeted small-group interventions for elaboration and planning, tracked via regular anecdotal notes; and Tier 3 intensive individualized sessions for goal-setting and revision, prioritizing emotional safety and student agency.
- Data Analysis: Leverage formative assessments (e.g., conferring notes, on-demand writing samples) and summative pre/post benchmarks to personalize pacing, ensuring students produce structured, cohesive compositions in a nurturing environment that celebrates writing progress through low-pressure, voluntary sharing.